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ABSTRACT

The Supreme Court's landmark Brown decision changed the total pattern of race relations in the United States and helped to solidify the foundations of American democracy for the benefit of all Americans. Ironically, although the specific issue which resulted in the Brown decision was concerned with the constitutionality of racially segregated public schools, the beneficial consequences have been more pervasive and pronounced in aspects of society other than the field of public education. The effects of the Brown decision on education form an inconsistent pattern: segregated schools continue to exist, and seem to be proliferating, especially in the North; a biracial system of higher education persists in the South; and the most racially desegregated area of higher education is varsity athletics. It is clear that the pattern of resistance to any genuine compliance with the Brown decision is pervasive and formidable. As a whole, educators have defaulted in helping society to understand that the defense and maintenance of a segregated educational system is not only inimical to the imperatives of a functioning democracy, but also makes it difficult to attain the important goals of education. Racially imbalanced schools do not prepare children to cope effectively in a contemporary and future world. The Brown decision should be required reading in the training of all teachers. (KH)

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EDUCATIONAL TRENDS AND U. S. COMMITMENTS SINCE THE BROWN DECISION

Dr. Kenneth Clark

Nearly thirty years ago, on May 17, 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court handed down the historic Brown decision which ruled that racially segregated public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. In its unanimous decision written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Court stated:

> We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

As one reads this momentous decision, it becomes increasingly clear that it ranks among such great documents in man's struggle for the substance and solidity of democracy as the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights. The simple and eloquent language of the Brown decision articulated once again the promises and ideals of American democracy and stated that these promises and the opportunities for a constructive role in a democratic society must be made available to all without regard to race or color.

As one reads and rereads the Brown decision, one sees that this is not only a strong and positive restatement of the responsibility, indeed the obligation, of a democratic society to protect the rights of all of its citizens, but it is also a total acceptance of the Jeffersonian belief that a solid public education available to all is the essential foundation for a truly functioning democracy. At the same time that it was a powerful constitutional, legal, psychological and human document, it was also a most important statement of the critical, pivoting and integrating role of public education in maintaining the stability of the American democratic system. In this regard the words of the Brown decision are

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direct and explicit and could only be diluted by any attempt to paraphrase them:

> Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society.... It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

In addressing itself to the specific problem of the effects of racial segregation on the duality of educational opportunity for minority students, the Court was most explicit. Legal purists have criticized the Brown decision for rejecting traditional legal precedents and instead resorting to the "soft" findings of social psychologists in its key assertion concerning the damage which segregated schools inflicts upon minority children:

> To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.

In developing this human concern with the welfare and future of these children, the Supreme Court quoted the specific educational finding of the Kansas federal court to the effect that

> A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of the law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.

The United States Supreme Court then arrived at the definitive conclusion of the Brown decision:

> We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

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This landmark decision changed the total pattern of race relations in the United States--particularly in the southern states. It removed the power of the state and federal government as a basis of support for racial discrimination and segregation. Its clear assertion of fundamental social, psychological truths and human values cleared the way for the removal of all states laws which required or permitted racial segregation in public accomodations, public transportation and publicly supported recreational facilities. The Brown decision made it possible for Blacks to defy the remaining vestige of flagrant racial cruelties through the non-violent civil disobedience movement so admirably directed by the late Maritn Luther King, Jr. And it made it possible for the executive and legislative branches of the Federal government to become active partners, without apology, in the ongoing struggle for racial justice. Ten years after the Brown decision, the Congress of the United States passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act which sought to prohibit racial discrimination in employment. In 1965 it passed the Voting Rights Act which sought to prohibit racial discrimination in employment. In 1965 it passed the Voting Rights Act which up to the present has significantly increased the population and involvement of all minorities in the political process by removing traditional racial barriers and subterfuges.

Without question the Brown decision and its consequences has helped to solidfy the foundations of American democracy for the benefit of all Americans. The early successes of the Civil Rights Movement in the wake of the Brown decision motivated other groups of Americans such as women, and native Americans, Hispanics

Asians, the gays to seek unqualified justice and the removal of remaining patterns of discrimination directed against them. From this broad and general perspective not only has there been substantial progress in race relations since the Brown decision but also the promise of American democracy has become more substantive for all Americans.

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Ironically, although the specific issue presented to the Supreme Court and which resulted in the Brown decision was concerned with the constitutionality of racially segregated public schools--a specific educational issue--the beneficial consequences were more pronounced, pervasive and observable in other aspects of the society than in the field of public education itself. In attempting to assess the direct effects of the Brown decision on the organization of American educational institutions--public and private elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools and colleges--one is confronted with a pattern of inconsistencies and anomalies:

- Laws requiring or permitting segregated schools no longer exist but de facto segregated schools continue to exist and seem to be proliferating.

- Private schools and academies have increased and have been sponsored by various religious denominations as havens for white students whose parents are seeking to avoid sending their children to desegregated public schools.

- In spite of the above fact, according to the latest available figures, a higher percentage of Black children are attending nonsegregated schools in

southern states than the percentage of Black students attending nonsegregated schools in northern urban communities.

- As a matter of fact, a higher percentage of Black students are attending de facto schools in such northern urban communities as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Los Angeles than were attending such racially homogenous schools at the time of the Brown decision.

- A biracial system of higher education persists in those southern states which prior to Brown had laws requiring this system. While traditionally white colleges do not now exclude Black students, publicly supported traditionally Black colleges remain racially homogenous, are unable or unwilling to attract white students, and justify their continued existence on the need to meet the educational inferiority of their Black students who cannot meet the admission standards of the traditionally white schools.

- The most racially desegregated area of American higher education appears to be in the realm of varsity athletics which probably indicates the fact that college administrators and faculties do not hold their desired athletes to the same educational standards that they maintain for other students.

It is clear that the pattern of resistance to any genuine compliance with the letter and spirit of the Brown decision is pervasive and formidable. This is particularly true in those northern cities with a high percentage of ghettoized Blacks. White middle class parents have abandoned the public schools and have enrolled their children in suburban schools or in private and parochial schools. There are indications that this pattern is being followed by more affluent Black families, thereby resulting in the fact that urban public schools have now become predominantly Black and segregated.

Thirty years after the Brown decision the fact of the racial segregation in urban public schools is a mocking educational reality. The subtle and flagrant excuses for the resegregation of American public schools; anti-bussing propaganda, the resurgence of the worship of neighborhood schools which demand segregated schools in the light of residential segregation--all of these erode the democratic foundation of American public education. To the extent that they are succeeding, they are in effect a functional repeal of the historic Brown decision in the specific area of public education.

This is particularly tragic in the light of the fact that racially segregated schools damage human beings and restrict their ability to function constructively within the complexities of a demanding democratic society. And there is no evidence that this is less true in de facto schools than it was when the desegregation was required by law. After the Brown decision Americans who persist in the perpetuation of racially segregated schools and who refuse to accept realistic remedies for the elimination of biracial educational systems cannot say with honesty that they do not know that they are inflicting irreparable damage upon minority children who are being rejected by an educational system which should be seeking to conserve them.

As one who has been a member of the educational establishment all of my adult life--one who chose to contribute his abilities to this most important function of a civilized society, the education of the young--I am embarrassed at this stage of my life to be forced to admit that educators as a whole, with some notable exceptions, have defaulted in helping our society to understand that the defense and maintenance of a segregated educational system is not only inimical to the imperatives of a functioning democracy, but also makes it difficult, if not impossible, to attain the important goals of education.

The purpose of education is to free the human mind of ignorance, superstition, irrational fears and hatreds, tribalisms, parochialisms, and those hostilities which interfere with the ability of human beings to interact constructively with their fellow human beings. A truly educated person must be able to understand the commonality of human experience and aspirations and to relate to and to help his fellow human beings in terms of empathy and such uniquely human values as justice, kindness and social sensitivity. The perpetuation of racial and ethnic prejudices and discrimination counters these educational goals and values. The very fact of racially segregated schools reinforces racial prejudices.

Educators above all others--probably including the clergy--should know that racially segregated schools are concrete symbols of superstition and prejudices. By their existence and certainly by their defense, these segregated institutions contradict and mock attempts to teach democratic and human values. These values cannot be taught by words if the social institutions within which they are being taught deny their validity. Black children who are required to attend racially segregated schools learn quite early in their lives that they are the victims of a democratic sham. They not only question their own value as human beings worthy of respect but they also question the validity of an educational process and the educators who impose this dehumanization upon them. These detrimental consequences

of educational segregation upon minority children must clearly be known by educators. By their silence, educators are accessories to the perpetuation of this damage on powerless human beings.

What is probably not as clearly understood by the general public and by educators is the fact that racially segregated schools and their inherent reinforcement of racial prejudices also severely damage the very white children that the society seeks to protect rather than to reject. While these children may not suffer the same degree of measurable academic retardation which one finds in Black children, a racially segregated educational system imposes upon the white children a severe and debilitating degree of moral and ethical retardation. Unfortunately the eloquent Brown decision did not emphasize this fact. It merely stated the damage to Black children. In the social science appendix to the legal brief which was submitted to the Supreme Court, it was stated that while the effects of segregation on white children are rather more obscure, the complex pattern of nonadaptive personality reactions have been observed. Many of these children are burdened with unrealistic fears and hatreds and are permitted and at times encouraged to direct feelings of hostility toward minorities who are perceived as weak and inferior. As a result of being taught democratic principles and values by parents, teachers and clergy while being taught by these same individuals the need to violate these principles within a school setting which also violates them, these white children become the victims of moral confusion, conflict and moral cynicism. Some of these children seek to resolve these conflicts by personal guilt feelings, or by asserting the rationalizations and stereotypes of the larger society and by intensifying the hostility toward minorities. In seeking to upgrade the quality of education for Black children it has been stated that "the mind is a terrible thing to waste." This is true; but it is equally true that in our concern for the future welfare of white children, we

must understand that the soul or the functioning conscience of a people is also a "tragic thing to waste."

Whatever the particular pattern of adjusting to these inescapable conflicts inherent in the existence of racially segregated schools in American democracy, these children are not being educated to cope effectively in a contemporary and future world. Two-thirds of the people of the world are non-white. In order to be able to interact with these diverse peoples, American students cannot be burdened with nonadaptive stereotypes, unrealistic hostilities and social awkwardness. The diversity of the American population, the existence of Black, brown, and white students in our schools, is a most valuable asset in the education and preparation of American children for a most positive role in international communication and interaction. This valuable human educational resource will be wasted in the anachronism of racially segregated American schools.

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Given this perspective, what then is the responsibility, indeed, the obligation of American educators at this period of American history, thirty years after the Brown decision and in the midst of the technological and nuclear age? How can educators now compensate for their past silence and default in trying to help the American public and public officials understand that it is now an educational imperative that the vestiges of the anachronism of a biracial educational system must be eliminated?

American educators and their associations must have the courage, clarity and the profound understanding to say to the American people that racially segregated schools seriously impair the ability to attain the goals of a democratic education. As the chief custodians of this most important social function of preparing our young people for a constructive, creative and humane role in a world of the future, educators must assume the risks of insisting repeatedly that a civilization

based upon justice cannot be communicated to the young in an educational system which by its organization reinforces rejection and hostility. Educators cannot follow the tyranny of the masses. By definition and by choice of this profession, educators must be moral leaders. Up to the present, leadership in racial progress in America has been left to the courts and the legal profession, and some public officials. They have gone almost as far as they can go in articulating the requirements of social justice in the United States. It is now up to those of us who claim the responsibility for educational leadership to insist that in the realm of education there must be unquestioned justice, equality and humanity.

Specifically, we must now insist that in the training of teachers and supervisors, the Brown decision must be required reading. Every teacher training institution and educational association should plan and conduct periodic seminars on the substance and meaning of the Brown decision. Examination for teachers and promotion of supervisors should be based upon their understanding of the letter and spirit of this important democratic document.

Educators should insist that not only should schools be desegregated, but that this desegregation should only be the first step toward an integrated educational experience for all students. Students of diverse backgrounds should be permitted to learn from each other, to cooperate with each other and to develop a sense of their common anxieties, hopes and aspirations.

Educators should insist that the isolation of students in terms of race, economic status or intellectual potentialities in an allegedly desegregated school is intolerable, cruel and interferes with the practical and humane goal of education.

Educators must point out unequivocally that in seeking to conserve the awesome, delicate and fragile system of life which is the human being in its formative

stages, our educational system and our educational personnel must accept, respect, and encourage each child place in our charge. This is an awesome responsibility for future peace, justice, tranquility and a dynamic civilization.

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